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Extended Abstract

A Study of English Translations of Attar's *Conference of Birds* Based on the Correct Understanding of the Original Text: A Case Study of Sholeh Wolpé and Dick Davis's Translations of the Story of Sheikh San'an

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Introduction

Translation of literary text is a challenging task. In literary translation, selecting the appropriate equivalent of words depends on the translator's understanding of the source language and culture. If the source text is a mix of language and culture, translation becomes more challenging. Translation of a poem is the most complicated type of literary translation because of its difficulty in understanding. The form and meaning in the poem are interconnected, and the language of the poem is implied. These cause multiple and sometimes incorrect interpretations of the poem. The more aesthetic aspects of the language

in the poem, the greater the possibility of misinterpretation and translation errors. In Persian mystical poetry, the problem is much more complicated. The existence of a rich network of words, interpretations, and terms in Persian mystical text makes it difficult to understand and translate text.

In this article, two recent English translations of Attar's *Conference of Birds* (*Manteq ol-Teyr*) were selected: Sholeh Wolpé's and Dick Davis's translations. Davis's translation is based on the edition by Sadegh Gouharin and Wolpé's is based on the edition by Mohammad-Reza Sha'fi Kadkani. The faithfulness of the translators to the original text and their accurate understanding of it have been evaluated and analyzed in the story of "Sheikh San'an".

Methodology and Literature Review

This study is qualitative and text analysis. First, the translation of each line from the source text was determined in the destination text. Then, the English translations were translated back into Farsi. This process is called back-translation. The source and destination texts were compared to identify differences. Finally, translators' accuracy and fidelity to the source text were evaluated and analyzed.

There is some research on Davies's translation. Most of these researches focused on how the mystical terms transferred in this translation. "An Investigation of Mystic term on *Conference of the Birds* by Attar on the Basis of Van Doorslaer's Map" by Saber Noie (2018) and "Translation of Persian Mystic

Terms into English: a case study of *Conference of Birds* by Attar" by Sadaf Khosroshahi and Ahmad Sedighi (2017) are some examples. Fateme Tavakoli (2014) also compared the translations of Davis and Kale Kasemaa in her dissertation. The authors didn't find any research on Wolpé's translation. Also, there is no example of the simultaneous examination of two English translations of *Conference of Birds* in reference databases.

Discussion

In these translations, there are four types of errors:

1. Misreading of the source text

In line 1512 of Goharin's version, "تَف" means heat. But Davis read it as "تُف".

تــو یــقــیــن مــی‌دان کــه صـــد عــالــم گنـاه   از تــف یــک تــوبــه بــرخــیـــزد ز راه

Davis: A world of sin, be sure, shall with contrition's spittle be made pure.

2. Destruction of the semantic networks of the source text

In line 1479 of Goharin's version, "ترسایی خریدن" is equivalent to "دین برانداختن". It means blasphemy. Davis translated "ترسایی خریدن" as "accept The Christian cult" and also eliminated the "دین برانداختن". so, the concept of "blasphemy" was not transferred to the target text.

زهـد بــفــروشـــیـم و رســـوایــی خــریــم   دیــن بــرانــدازیـم و تــرســـایــی خــریــم

Davis: We should exchange the honours of belief for odium and scorn; we should accept The Christian cult our sheikh could not reject.

3. Destruction of the syntactic structure of the source text

in lines 1536-1537 from Kadkani's version and 1528-1529 from Goharin's version, "اصحابناش ا" means "her companions" and in the second stanza the pronoun "ش" refers to Sheikh and has the role of object. The second stanza is a description of the sheik's seeing state. But translators have considered it for companions.

چــون بــدیــدنـد آنـچـنــان اصـــحــابـنــاش   مــانــده در انــدوه و شـــادی مــبــتــلاش

پــیـــش او رفـتـنـد ســـرگـردان هـمـه   وز پـیِ شــــکــرانــه جــانافشـــان هــمــه

Wolpé: When his disciples saw him in such a state, they were stunned with grief and bliss. They greeted him amazed and thankful.

Davis: They reeled between despair and joy – bewildered they drew near and sighed; From gratitude they gladly would have died.

4. Destruction of the rhetorical structure of the source text

in line 1332 of Kadkani's version and 1325 of Goharin's version, "فتح" allusions to the happy state. "در فتوح لگد زدن" means destroy this happy state and "بر کسی زدن" also means paying attention to him.

بـیــش ازیـن بـر جـان ایـن مسـکـیـن مـزن   در فــتـــوح او لــگــد چــنـــدیـــن مـزن

Wolpé: Don't kick this poor wretch's soul anymore, don't trample him like a conqueror.

Davis: You need not try to humble wretchedness, or kick the foe Who in the dust submissively bows low.

Wolpé translated "لگد در فتوح او مزن" to "don't trample him" and "بر جان مسکین مزن" to "Don't kick this poor". It proves a misunderstanding of ironies. Although Davis was more successful than Wolpé in the first stanza, but he didn't understand the irony of the second stanza.

Conclusion

This study evaluates and analyzes Wolpé and Davis's translations of Attar's *Conference of Birds*, focusing on the Sheikh San'an story. Most of errors in these translations are rooted in the complexity of syntactic constructions in the Persian poem, the translators' lack of knowledge about the rhetorical constructions in the source language, and the lack of diacritics (for short vowels) of the Persian script. In Davis's translation, there is evidence of adjusting the text according to the destination culture's favor. This study shows that Wolpé's translation is generally closer to the original text than Davis's.

Keywords: correct understanding of the text, translation of *Conference of Birds*, Davis, criticism of translation, Wolpé.

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